

ADOPTION

When it is not possible or in the best interest of the child to return to the biological family, consideration is given to placing the child for adoption. Several factors influence this decision: the attachment of the child to his/her biological family, the parent's ability and willingness to voluntarily relinquish the child for adoption, the juvenile court's determination of whether or not parental rights will be terminated and the older child's desire to be placed in an adoptive home.

Missouri law identifies the Children's Division (CD) as one of the agencies that may place a child for adoption, and establishes time frames for the completion of court ordered/requested adoptive assessments that are conducted once the child is placed in the prospective adoptive home. The court may direct any appropriate individual or agency, including the CD, to complete the assessment.

Persons who are interested in becoming adoptive parents apply at local CD offices. All applicants must complete the STARS/Spaulding training, provided through the Division. Children's Division workers and/or contracted providers complete the family assessment and screen suitable families. The home studies are initiated within thirty (30) days of the receipt of application and completed within four months, on families awaiting adoptive placement. Priority is given to those families interested in adopting a special needs child.

Prospective adoptive applicants may call the toll-free Foster/Adopt line (1-800-554-2222) for information about adoption. Those calls are answered in person, information is sent to the family, and then referred to the appropriate county office. Follow-up activities are conducted on a routine basis to assure that the family receives training information and that their questions are answered. The Division maintains an Internet web site Adoption Photo Listing that is located at <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/adopt>. Children listed on the web site receive exposure on this site, as well as another web site: www.AdoptUSKids.org.

The CD continues to recruit families for children through publicity efforts that utilize newsletters, printed promotional material, public service announcements, and local projects to enlist the assistance of communities and churches. Particular emphasis is placed on the need for the adoption of "special needs" children. The Division works in collaboration with different community partners to recruit for "special needs" children.

One successful recruitment project is a partnership between the CD and Fort Leonard Wood, a U.S. Army post in Pulaski County. A unit of CD adoption specialists is based within the county where the Fort is located to recruit and approve military families as adoptive resources for children with special needs. Non-military families in the surrounding counties are also recruited. After the events of September 11, 2001, this event has not been allowed to take place on the military base. However, in the summers of 2003 and 2004, a community

group in the nearby town of Rolla collaborated with the Division, the hospital and the University of Missouri-Rolla's fraternity and sorority students to host this event in Rolla, which is in close proximity for the military personnel to participate. This collaboration has proven to be highly successful for continuing the recruitment of military families as resources for our children.

Another community collaboration is with the One Church, One Child (OCOC) program. This on-going program recruits adoptive homes for waiting African-American children. A CD liaison works directly with participating churches to provide information on the adoption process and specific children waiting for adoption.

In 2004 the Children's Division began working with Wendy's of Missouri in Springfield. Wendy's began a website with adoption information and profiles of available children and general information for families considering foster care and adoption. In addition they promote the adoption series "For Your Life" which airs on television markets throughout the state. "For Your Life" is a series of live interviews with children seeking permanent adoptive homes.

A final example of community collaboration is the "A Place to Call Home" television specials that are shown several times per week on a local St. Louis television station. The Foster and Adoption Care Coalition in collaboration with the Division, organizes this program with the television station, taking referrals from Division staff. This television show has resulted in several adoptive placements for children, and two featured children even caught the attention of the Hallmark Channel, and their success stories were featured on the Hallmark Channel's national television program, entitled, "Adoption."

In 2002, the CD contracted with 23 providers to provide recruitment, training and assessment of foster and adoptive resources statewide. In March 2005 we have 22 providers. This is a project that is funded through adoption subsidy funds. Contractors are working to recruit potential resource families based on the types of children waiting for permanency. Currently, there are 9,126 homes approved by the CD as adoptive homes. This number includes 1,415 approved families that are waiting for an adoptive placement and 7,711 families that have placements and are receiving adoption subsidy for a child(ren) in placement. Additionally, many of these are also licensed foster homes. Foster parents often adopt their foster children if they are available for adoption by the juvenile court.

The CD finalized adoption for 725 children in SFY-98, 1019 children in SFY-99, 1,245 children in SFY-00, 1,260 children in SFY-01, 1,517 in SFY-02, 1,420 in SFY-03 and 1379 in SFY-04, 704 as of March 1, 2005. Currently, there are 126 children in the temporary, pre-adoptive custody of adoptive parents. These children have been placed for adoption by the Division and are waiting for the adoption to be finalized by the juvenile court. There is usually a six-month period

of time between initial adoptive placement and finalization of the adoptive process.

As of February 28, 2005, there were 807 children who were available for adoption and awaiting adoptive placement, as the termination of parental rights (TPR) process had been completed. There were an additional 1,118 children for whom a goal of adoption had been established, but TPR had not yet been completed.

In order to assist in locating an appropriate adoptive home for every child in the state who is legally free for adoption, Missouri has created a Second Level Matching Team. This statewide team was developed to match waiting families with children available for adoption. Area adoption representatives meet every two months to facilitate matches from across the state. The original intent of the Second Level Adoption Matching Team was to assist those adoptive families who have been waiting over 90 days for an adoptive placement and to eradicate geographical boundaries within and outside the State of Missouri. Many out of state families are matched with children during these meetings.

Collaboration continues with partner agencies and organizations to provide ongoing support for adoptive placements. One agency, the Adoption Exchange of St. Louis has initiated a Mentoring Project, created lending libraries in all of our geographic areas, and partnered with the Division to form the Adoptcare Network, which highlights therapists around the state who have been specifically trained to work with adoptive family issues.

Missouri has been receiving adoption incentive payments and utilizing them to cover the costs of adoption related expenses locally through contracts with attorneys to help in filing Termination of Parental Rights petitions. Missouri received \$110,999 in FFY-99 for adoption incentive payments, In FFY-00, Missouri received \$555,365 and in FFY-01 \$719,636 in adoption incentive monies, in FFY-02, Missouri received approximately \$1.3 million dollars in adoption incentive grant. In FFY-03 Missouri received \$366,000 and in FFY-04 \$494,000. A spending plan was developed to utilize a portion of this grant, which focused on recruitment and retention efforts for adoptive families for children. Other funds from the grant were used for direct services provided to children in adoption placement.